DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 153 996 SP 012 708

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TITLE The Teaching Center: A Vehicle for Integrating Theory and Practice.
PUB DATE 2 Feb 78
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting, Association of Teacher Educators (Las Vegas, Nevada, January 31-February 3, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College School Cooperation; College Teachers; Higher Education; *Interinstitutional Cooperation; *Interprofessional Relationship; Public School Teachers; *Role Theory; *Staff Role; *Teacher Centers; *Teacher Education

ABSTRACT

Ways are examined in which teacher centers can aid in the integration of educational theory and practice. It is observed that through cooperative effort, the roles of the university and school personnel involved in teacher center work are slowly modified over time. Activities examined for integrating effects are: governance, staff renewal, the meshing of preservice and inservice, decision-making sessions, support services, and research. These activities, buttressed by an open climate promoting appreciation of other points of view, are seen as the ingredients for integrating campus and field. (MJB)

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"The Teaching Center: A Vehicle for Integrating Theory and Practice"

Since the dawn of formalized education, the gap between theory and practice has been a near insurmountable chasm. Traditionally, much of the problem arises from the roles assumed by university professors and classroom teachers. The theorists - university professors - are viewed as hiding behind "ivy-covered" walls, while the practitioners - classroom teachers - are viewed as being entrenched in out-of-date school systems -- and ne'er the twain shall meet. Unfortunately, it is no easy task to undo dearly guarded roles that have developed over decades, even centuries. However, the emergence of teaching centers has provided a vehicle for not only modifying these traditional roles but also for narrowing the theory-practice gap. Thus, this paper examines the available methods of teaching centers for integrating theory and practice while, at the same time, modifying the roles of the university and school personnel.

Emergence of Teaching Centers

Within the last ten years, teaching centers have emerged as a predominant force in teacher education. Most of the original centers in this country were based on the British Teacher Centres' model but have since evolved into several different types of centers - each with its own

focus. Congress has acknowledged this educational thrust by passing the Mondale Bill and, thereby, making available several million dollars for the development and implementation of centers across the country. In addition, the Association of Teacher Educators, at the 1977 annual meeting, presented their finalist awards for the Distinguished Teacher Education Program to three teaching centers. In 1974, the Syracuse Study estimated that there were as many as 4,500 teacher center programs in the nation.[1] It is clear that the mechanics of a teaching center have attained national interest and have simultaneously enhanced the possibility of integrating theory and practice.

Teaching Center Concept

In order to understand the framework for this discussion, one must first be acquainted with the teaching center concept. Schmeider and Yarger suggest that teacher centering confronts several of the major questions that have plagued teacher educators for years:

> 1. How can curriculum development and staff development be effectively integrated?
> 2. How can generally uncommunicative (sometimes unfriendly) educational constituencies (students, teachers, administrators, supervisors, college and university staff, interested community) best share experiences and resources?
> 3. How can preservice and inservice educational personnel development be successfully linked?

> 4. And, probably most important, how can educational personnel be continually renewed in their ability and vigor?[2]

This paper is primarily concerned with the collaborative model wherein a consortium is formed between a university and school system(s). In most cases, these centers arise from an expressed need of the university or public school system. Collins describes these needs as being either institutional or personal. An institutional need might be that of a university to create a better field laboratory experience or setting for student teachers or the need of a school system to provide more and better opportunities for inservice training and/or curriculum development. Well known among this type of center are the Dallas, Maryland, Syracuse, and West Virginia teaching centers. A personal need might be that of teachers wanting to update their teaching skills, develop an independent study program for students, learn better ways to deal with classroom management problems, or become better able to provide an open forum for decision-making. Such needs have resulted in the Teachers' Active Learning Center in San Francisco, The Teachers, Inc. in New York City, and the Durham Teacher-Parent Center in Philadelphia.[3] Therefore, the basic tenet of a center is that

> if both educators of children and educators of teachers recognize in wider perspective the responsibilities traditionally

> confined to only one body or the other, and then both bring to the tackling of those responsibilities a wider range of personal and material resources, a wider range of commitment, they stand a far better chance of discharging their responsibilities to everyone's mutual benefit.[4]

The key to the success of a center is that both university and public school personnel work together, as equals, so that both institutions benefit. As a result, the roles of all those involved are slowly changed so that theorists and practitioners exchange, debate, and create ideas and methods that improve both the instructional and programmatic components of each institution. The access to each other, the responsibility to work together, and the dedication to center goals create the opportunity and atmosphere for integrating theory and practice. It is encouraging, then, that although the concept of inter-institutional collaboration is a relatively recent phenomena on the educational scene, the Syracuse Study found that collaborative efforts in program development are already widespread within the teaching center movement.[5]

Methods for Integrating Theory and Practice

Governance. Once a teaching center has been chosen as the vehicle for integrating theory and practice, one must devise the methods for achieving this goal. It is imperative that the first step in this process be the

formulation of a directing council or policy board consisting of university and school personnel to establish goals and policies. In 1975, Howey called for an intensive study of variant governance structures and models of collaboration with specific attention to those processes which reflect effective trade-offs and reciprocity.[6] Obviously, such governing boards pose potentially serious problems of power-plays as both university and school's people must adjust their preconceived roles and power-bases. Yarger and Mallan discuss this issue and suggest that although covert and overt problems associated with the distribution of power are difficult, they may become more manageable if a given consortium analyzes its own situation, determines its own missions, and uses a reasoned change strategy.[7] Thus, university and school personnel now can begin planning, implementing, and integrating programs with a common goal of improving both institutions.

Staff Renewal. Perhaps no other group other than teachers has been as deluged with workshops, projects, innovations, ideas, and materials that have been done by <u>others</u>. In the main, teachers view this panacea of innovation as having relatively minor transfer into their classrooms. As a result, it is understandable that school faculty are somewhat suspicious of a professor's attempts

to implement staff renewal in their school. However, many reasons argue that teaching centers are the ideal vehicles for supporting staff renewal. Researchers tell us that in order for change to occur two important conditions must be met: a) Those effected by the change must accept it and be involved in it and b) some vehicle which facilitates the desired change and enables it to endure pressures of opposition and rejection must be utilized. Collins describes the unique potential of a center for meeting these conditions. First, an essential characteristic of a teaching center is that teachers can specify their own needs and priorities as well as determine the means by which these needs and priorities are met. Second, the teaching center is both a place and a vehicle for designing, facilitating, and promoting change.[8] Therefore, teachers are, in effect, in command of their own destiny and new theories are more acceptable as they find their way into the instructional and learning process as a means of satisfying a teaching or personal need.

Meshing Preservice and Inservice. Teaching centers strengthen their ability to integrate theory and practice by also integrating preservice and inservice programs. As student teachers develop teaching competence in general or specialized areas of interest, their cooperating teachers

also can strengthen their skills in these areas. For example, preservice students study a particular teaching method on campus, such as the Taba Inquiry Method, while at the same time their cooperating teachers are instructed in the identical method in the field. Kilgore and Evans describe the efforts of the Syracuse Urban Teaching Center:

> Center cooperating teachers have assumed added supervisory responsibilities for working with preservice students. Because of this, the preservice/inservice operation has been enhanced. Cooperating teachers must be aware of the educational theories, teaching skills, and teaching strategies that preservice students are learning while on campus and being asked to demonstrate in the classroom.[9]

Not only does this allow student teachers and classroom teachers to learn side-by-side, it also allows the campus instructor to interact with classroom teachers in the field and to create, test, and implement theories in an actual classroom. As a result, several myths are destroyed as the professor becomes more field-oriented and the teacher experiments with new theories in the classroom.

Working Groups. Working groups composed of representatives from the university and school jointly decide all matters concerning the center. In several instances, state legislatures have mandated competency-based teacher education programs be developed with input from both university

and public schools. Thus, besides generic and content-related competencies, working groups decide such matters as preservice field requirements, inservice courses, evaluation procedures, etc. As a result, theorists and practitioners must set aside their educational biases in order to derive workable solutions pertaining to both campus and field. A constant exchange and debate of theories, ideas, strategies, and experiences enable university professors and school teachers to better understand each other and to ultimately improve children's learning.

Support Services. Since the university and schools work together, they have a commitment to provide support services resulting in a common good. A teacher running short of ways to help a slow reading group contacts a university specialist with a new theory to apply. On the other hand, classroom teachers are asked to teach campus courses on teacher unions, instructional methods, or early childhood education. In these cases, the ultimate benefit is to both school and university - sharing new theories and practices.

Research. "Practitioners have very serious needs, researchers have been working on these needs, but very few have been concerned with bridging the gap between the two. We need to find a more effective means to get what

works into the classroom."[10] This quote by Schmeider illustrates a major gap between our educational institutions. Again, I view teaching centers as a possible solution to this dilemma. A university and schools partnership must have a commitment to research. Whether through a committee on research or through an expressed personal need, professors and teachers, together, study classroom problems, preservice and inservice programs, teaching strategies, and learning processes. Unfortunately, there is a common, but unfounded, belief that classroom teachers have no interest in research. Yet research that provides answers or solutions to classroom problems are welcomed by teachers. Again, theory and practice come together in a learning laboratory - the teaching center - as theory generates new research and research generates new theory.

In closing, the schools-university relationship fostered by a teaching center assists many people to learn both about their own job and those of others. The opportunity to have constant communication, the joint working groups, the support services, and especially the open climate that promotes listening to other points of view are the ingredients for integrating campus and field, and, more importantly, theory and practice. Yet, Kelly has said that public schools should not try to become Colleges of Education and, likewise, Colleges of Education

should not try to become public schools- and I think he is right.[11] However, we should not be afraid to share, to talk, to collaborate. Let us not mistake a suggestion for an encroachment. Let us not get caught up in our own roles that we believe that we are the only ones with the correct solution to the problem. Collaboration is much better than confrontation. Perhaps Christine San Jose' said it best:

> We're still the same people in the university and in the schools, we haven't turned overnight into paragons of wisdom and beatitude, but because we have so much better an understanding of each other's needs and strengths, so much wider view of where to go for help and where to offer it, our efforts are better informed and more precisely directed.[12]

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